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National, modern, Hindu? The post-independence trajectory of Jalandhar's Harballabh music festival

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This article discusses the post-Independence trajectory of North India's oldest extant classical music festival. Processes of modernisation and nationalisation transformed the Harballabh festival into a professionally organised concert, with little resemblance to the fair or 'Rāg Melā' it used to be. I demonstrate the tension between the 'modernisation' begun by Ashwini Kumar post-1948 and a subtle though unmistakable 'Hinduisation' championed by other middle-class organisers. Kumar's attempts during the 1950s and 1960s to shape a new, disciplined audience, schooled in practices of rapt listening, were also in direct contrast to conceptions about 'restive' and rustic Punjabi audiences. The article raises larger questions about the cultural politics of music performance in postcolonial India by focusing on the shifting character of middle-class cultural patronage, the tussle between traditional and modern formats of music festival organisation and the complicated division of public space along secular/sacred axes.

Keywords: Nationalisation, region, patronage, professionalisation, Hinduisation, religiosity, music, middle classes

Introduction

In the winter of 1875, music lover, amateur musician and *mahant* (priest) of the *shaktī-pīṭh* site at Jalandhar's Devi Talab (lit. 'The Goddess' Pond'),[1] Baba Harballabh,

[1] *Shaktī-pīṭh* are important pilgrimage centres associated with the mother goddess in Hinduism, where the remains of Shiva's wife Sati are said to have fallen, when he carried her corpse across the universe in grief and sorrow. The left breast of the goddess Shakti apparently fell at Devi Talab in Jalandhar.

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invited other musicians to honour the memory of his guru, the preceding *mahant* Swami Tulja Giri. In so doing, Harballabh unwittingly inaugurated what is today renowned as the oldest extant festival of Hindustani classical music.[2] Although located on a sacred Hindu site, the Harballabh was a cosmopolitan space for music-making from the beginning, with Muslim *dhrupad* experts of Punjab and present-day Haryana being among the first to perform.[3] The origins of the festival lie in the tradition of singing *dhrupad* couplets in Sanskrit and Braj in North Indian temples. A classical music genre associated with Hindu spirituality, *dhrupad*, was widely performed not only in temples but also heavily patronised by the Mughals and other medieval Indian rulers.[4] It was very widely prevalent in the Punjab—with musicologists believing that Guru Nanak himself sang to the accompaniment of the *rabab*, in a variant of *dhrupad*, which survives as *partāl* singing of the Sikh tradition today. Muslim practitioners of *dhrupad* have been extremely prominent throughout the Punjab. The genre was part of the more diverse forms for music-making present in nineteenth-century Punjab, ranging from art music to Sikh *kirtan* and Sufi *qawwali*.[5] Other music traditions were practised most prominently by the region's versatile *mirasis* (hereditary genealogists and bards)—who performed music genres including folk music, *bhajans*, *qawwali* and art music.[6]

Early nineteenth Punjab was also a hub for the patronage of art music at the Sikh and Hill courts, where musicians, predominantly Muslim, found employment. Equally significant was the encouragement of music by religious institutions like *dargahs*, *gurudwaras* and temples. This wider milieu explains why it was par for the course for a Brahmin temple priest in Jalandhar to inaugurate a music festival where Muslim musicians were esteemed fellow performers, in an eclectic, 'shared space' of mystic devotionalism cutting across communities.[7]

[2] 1875 is accepted as the most likely date for the beginning of the festival and mentioned across sources and the official website of Shri Baba Harballabh Mahasabha. The only exception is the 1911 issue of the *Indian Music Journal*, which suggests the date could be 1878, given it publishes a notice stating that the 34th Sammelan would take place in December 1911. Neuman, 'The Production of Aura', p. 105. The Limca Book of Records bestowed on the festival a 'National Record' in 2013, asserting it is the oldest music festival in all of India. Refer http://www.harballabh.org. This 'award' needs to be taken with a pinch of salt, since there are examples of Carnatic music festivals that predate the Harballabh, such as the Tyagaraja Aradhana festival of Tamil Nadu going back to 1846.

[3] For example, Miyan Ahmad Baksh of Phillour, Miyan Muhammad Bakhsh of Hoshiarpur district Haryana, Vilayat Ali and Meeran Bakhsh from Sham Chaurasi who participated at the second Harballabh gathering in 1876. Bawra, *Harivallabh Darshan*, p. 23.

[4] Sanyal and Widdess, *Dhrupad*.

[5] The most important work in English on Sikh *kirtan* music remains Mansukhani, *Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtan*; in Punjabi, refer Kanwal, *Panjab De Parsidh*. On Sufi music in Punjab, refer Qureshi, *Sufi Music* and Pannke, *Singers and Saints*.

[6] Tandon, *Punjabi Century*, p. 79 and Neuman, *The Life of Music*, pp. 90–135.

[7] I borrow the term 'shared space' from Mir's idea of Punjabi *qisse* revealing 'shared notions of piety', in opposition to a simplistic notion of 'syncretism' that presupposes a fixed, 'pre-existing religious identity', not adequately representative for much of colonial Punjab. Refer Mir, 'Genre and Devotion'.

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The arrival in Punjab of Maharashtrian reformer Pt. V.D. Paluskar in 1898 with ideas about nationalising and modernising Indian classical music along 'Hindu devotional' lines resulted in a broad and discernible shift in the organisation of music in many, if not all, parts of the Punjab.[8] Paluskar certainly had an unmistakable impact on the Harballabh festival—with Pt. Tolo Ram responding to his message by actively working to nationalise this locally prominent festival.[9] The impromptu gathering or 'Rāg Melā' of musicians gradually metamorphised, by the turn of the century, into an annual Musical Conference. This change was effected by Jalandhar's emergent middle classes, particularly swayed by Paluskar's message of actively aligning Indian classical music with Hinduism and Hindu performers, and severing its connection with traditionally Muslim practitioners. By 1922, coinciding with the height of the national movement, a 'Sangeet Mahasabha' had been founded in Jalandhar, formed of city notables and middle-class professionals. Elsewhere, I have outlined this transition in the Harballabh's performance space from a fluid, mystic cosmopolitanism to a more fixed 'concert performance' format infused with Paluskar's brand of Hindu devotionalism.[10]

This shift was consolidated but also challenged with the turn to Independence and the calamitous population exchanges following partition. Post-partition, Jalandhar emerged as the new urban cultural hub of the Indian Punjab, taking on the mantle of Lahore for those in East Punjab. The demographic complexion of the city also changed completely in 1947 when its Muslim residents, constituting a majority of the population (44.5%, followed by Hindus at 33%, per the 1911 Census) migrated westwards, and in turn, a sizable population of Hindus and Sikhs came in from Pakistan.[11] Mosques such as Jama Masjid at Punj Pir Bazar, Masjid Ghumaran, Masjid Ali and those in Basti Sheikh Darvesh and Sayeedan Gate were then occupied by Hindus and Sikhs who turned them into temples, gurudwaras or

[8] Pt. V.D. Paluskar (1872–1931) took on the mantle of the reformation of Indian music. His first visits to the Harballabh coincided with the establishment of his first Gandharva Mahavidyalaya at Lahore (1901). This reformation drive, supported in the main by English-educated, middle-class Indian elites led to a redefinition and conscious restructuring of music, assigning it a new, modern respectability. For more on Paluskar, refer Bakhle, *Two Men and Music*; for details on Paluskar's reception in Punjab, refer Kippen, *Gurudev's Drumming Legacy*. Paluskar also had an impact on the *content* of musical performance at Harballabh, where there was a shift from the older, more fixed and meditative *dhrupad* to the newer, more flexible genre of *khayāl.*

[9] Pt. Tolo Ram succeeded Baba Harballabh as *mahant* of the Devi Talab, upon the latter's death in 1885. It was under his leadership that the concerts became regularised on an annual basis.

[10] Kapuria, 'Rethinking Musical Pasts'.

[11] *Punjab District Gazetteers, Volume XIV B, Jalandhar District, Statistical Tables 1916,* p. xliv. This gazetteer compiles tables from the 1911 census. For Jalandhar *tahsil* itself in 1911, the Muslims comprised around 49 per cent, Hindus about 30.7 per cent and Sikhs 19.3 per cent. *Ibid*., p. xlv. As per a stray estimate in Dilgeer, Muslims comprised 85 per cent population of the city. Dilgeer, *Encyclopedia of Jalandhar*, p. 10. The 1980 Gazetteer claims that in 1947 'the Muslims which formed about 60 per cent of the total population migrated to Pakistan'. Sharma, *Punjab District Gazetteers, Jalandhar*, p. 493.

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schools.[12] This mass exodus of Muslims significantly altered the composition of the bulk of Harballabh audience members and also performers.[13]

In the early post-Independence years in India and Pakistan, the cultural world—literature, film, music, poetry, theatre—was marked by a stubborn denial to engage with and reflect on the holocaust accompanying partition.[14] In the discourse around the Harballabh too, partition figures largely through its denial. Newspaper reports of the Harballabh for 1948 and 1949, for example, reflect this general tendency to minimise the momentous impact of partition. The report for 1948 tells us:

> The annual music conference known as 'Harballabh Rag Mela' will be held at Devi Talao from December 26 to 29. Pandit Vinaikrao Patwardhan, Principal Gandarb Mahavidyala of Poona, Prof. Narayanrao Vyas, a filmstar of Bombay, Pt. Krishnarao Cuankar, Principal, Gandharb Mahavidyala of Gwalior, Pt. Bawanrao, Principal, Gandharb Mahavidyala of Kolhapur and other prominent musicians will participate in the conference.[15]

There is no reference to the absence of Punjabi Muslim musicians like Salamat Ali–Nazakat Ali of the Sham Chaurasi *gharana,* for example, who were known to regularly perform at the festival during the pre-partition days. While a more elaborate description of the festival is given for the next year, 1949, it again only features a 'star' musician like Omkarnath Thakur.[16] In both examples from the immediate post-partition years, Paluskar's stalwart disciples such as Vinayak Rao Patwardhan, Narayan Rao Vyas and Thakur make their mark, as prominent pan-Indian performers who alone were deemed culturally praiseworthy, while local Punjabi musicians are not mentioned at all. This tendency had roots in the early twentieth century, when, inspired by Paluskar, the Harballabh shifted from its rural origins, attempting a more national *avatar*.[17] In Punjab more broadly, the nationalising 'Hindu' force represented by Paluskar and his followers allowed for a steady marginalisation of local Muslim artists, in what was effectively a double

[12] Dilgeer, *Encyclopedia of Jalandhar*, p. 10.

[13] 'The arrival of refugees from West Punjab (Pakistan) injected a new element into Jalandhar. The uprooted, to stand on their legs, set up any kind of trade. Most of the industry at Jalandhar before 1947 was owned by the Muslims and about 40 per cent of their population was engaged in it. The Hindus were mostly shopkeepers and financers. After Partition, the refugees stepped into the places of the Muslims in all spheres of industrial and business activities'. Sharma, *Punjab District Gazetteers, Jalandhar*, p. 493.

[14] Although writers from the Progressive Writers' Association such as Manto, Intizar Hussain, Ismat Chughtai and others like Chaman Nahal did write about Partition, on the whole, there was a noticeable silence on the issue. This persistent silence on the subject changed with the spurt of scholarship on Partition from the 1990s onwards. Refer Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*; Butalia, *The Other Side*; Pandey, *Remembering Partition*; Saint, *Witnessing Partition*.

[15] *The Tribune*, 22 December 1948, p. 2. To be sure though, it would be strange to find the space in such a short entry to name the people who were not performing.

[16] *The Tribune*, 31 December 1949, 'Harballabh Sangeet Conference at Jalandhar', p. 3.

[17] Kapuria, 'Rethinking Musical Pasts'.

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erasure, of both the local *and* the Muslim.[18] Narratives, and to a certain extent practices, of a Hinduised nationalism had therefore already altered the festival to such a vast degree that it no longer mattered if local performers were mentioned. The resultant sidelining of local Punjabi musicians at the expense of more glamorous and renowned 'outsiders' from Maharashtra and elsewhere is presented as a seamless continuity with the pre-1947 era, masking partition's impact on the musicians performing at the festival. It is only through the oral record that we know of the exodus of stalwart Muslim musicians from East Punjab to Pakistan after 1947, such as Amanat–Fateh Ali (Patiala), Salamat–Nazakat Ali (Sham Chaurasi) and Fateh–Mubarak Ali (Jalandhar) and the remarkable impact this had on the festival. Thus, the patronage of this festival as well as the character of those now invested in it changed remarkably due to partition.

For Jalandhar, the new political divisions also entailed a more enabling, positive impact. Given that it was one of the few urban, cosmopolitan centres in East Punjab that could take on the mantle of Lahore, the city was designated temporary[19] administrative capital of the East Punjab government. The most positive impact of this shift of capital was relocation of Lahore's All India Radio to Jalandhar.[20] The physical proximity to the festival of 'AIR Jalandhar' (set-up 1 November 1947) mirrored the new intimacy of Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha organisers with state actors during these years.[21]

According to B.N. Goswami, at the very time that 'radio emerged as an effective medium… the music system in North India was passing through a crucial stage of "codification and standardisation"'.[22] Independence marked out this connection even more starkly, with Dr B.V. Keskar's appointment as Information and Broadcasting Minister. Keskar held fort at the AIR for 9 years from 1952 to 1961, instituting a conscious policy of broadcasting classical music.[23] The zeal with which he worked to 'popularise' classical music during his tenure is summed up in a statement from 1953. Keskar clearly elaborates that 'it is the duty of the State'

[18] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of the article for pointing to this 'double erasure'.

[19] Prior to the shift to Chandigarh, the capital first shifted from Jalandhar to Shimla. Sharma, *Punjab District Gazetteers, Jalandhar*, p. 493.

[20] Amritsar's proximity to the new border ensured that it was rejected as a potential candidate for the capital, and especially a Radio centre. Dr Madan Gopal Singh has narrated how as a child growing up in post-1947 Amritsar, he used to tune into Radio Pakistan broadcast from Lahore which reached Amritsar till 1964, pointing to the presence of a 'radio republic' in South Asia which effectively subverted the new borders. Personal communication, 17 October 2010.

[21] Goswami, *Broadcasting*, p. 100. The 'Akashvani Jalandhar' relayed select pieces performed at the Harballabh for broadcasting to a wider public. This is evident in the report of General Secretary K.L. Jain, included in the Souvenir for the 96th Sammelan held in January 1972, which means the AIR relayed the items for the 1970 festival as in 1971 no festival took place due to the Indo-Pak War that year.

[22] *Ibid*., pp.17–18.

[23] Among the range of other changes made by Keskar were introduction of a new audition system, inaugurating the National Orchestra or 'Vadya Vrind', holding of an 'Annual Radio Sangeet Sammelan' and so on. Refer Goswami, *Broadcasting*, pp. 69–85.

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to assume responsibility for the well-being of classical music, which itself had to be disseminated as 'a vehicle of consolation and enjoyment to all cultured people in society'.[24] This official policy in turn amplified the importance of all classical music festivals across India, with the oldest Hindustani festival responding in ways elaborated in the next section.

The bounden 'duty of the State' to encourage classical music was especially evinced at the Harballabh music festival in its post-1947 phase. Various factors converged throughout this time to produce the Harballabh as a music festival of national excellence, at par with those organised in the more metropolitan centres of Calcutta, Bombay, Pune, Madras or indeed, pre-partition Lahore.[25] In conversation with the wider historiography on music and the middle classes in other regions of India, this article aims to recover the ideological history of this single institution in postcolonial Indian Punjab which aimed to create, to borrow Lakshmi Subramanian's words, 'a new context for classical music' in ways that were intimately linked to 'the projects of modernity and nationalism'.[26] Below, I chart the trajectory this festival took—in terms of patronage, organisation and listening practices—from a broadly secular nationalism in its initial post-Independence phase in the 1950s and 1960s, to the increasing Hinduisation of the festival from the late 1970s onwards. In charting the social and ideological history of this festival, I shall offer broader insights into the shifting nature of middle cultural patronage, the place of audience listening practices and the complex division of public space along sacred/secular lines in post-Independence India.

Modernisation and Its Discontents: The Harballabh Reaches Its 'Zenith'

The fluid composite patronage of the past, characterised by spontaneous voluntary aid largely by wealthy traders, as well as shopkeepers and commoners became more institutionalised in the 1950s. Although the Sangeet Mahasabha was formally established in 1922, its heyday came only in the 1950s, through the concrete efforts and variegated changes undertaken by Mr Ashwini Kumar (1929–2015), eminent sportsperson and high-ranking police official who now took over the reins of the festival.[27] Music connoisseur, man of letters, famous sports administrator,

[24] *The Tribune*, 23 December 1953, p. 5.

[25] Kapuria, 'A Muse for Music', Annexure II 'Music and Lahore: The Constitution of the Norms of Cultural Practice', pp. 197–209.

[26] Subramanian, *New Mansions*, p. 162.

[27] Kumar was Director General of the Punjab and Himachal Police and Principal of the Phillaur Police Training Academy at the time of his takeover of running the festival. He was born in Jalandhar and was a devoted Harballabh fan since his childhood days. He retired as the Director General of the Border Security Force and was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1972 for his outstanding service in the Indo-Pak War of 1965. Kumar was also a passionate sportsman and administrator who led many Indian sports contingents abroad in his capacity as the vice president of International Olympic Committee and the International Hockey Federation.

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empathetic pedagogue: such personal characteristics converged with historically contingent circumstances to position him as chief protagonist in the Harballabh's modernisation as a festival of national repute. With memories of attending the Harballabh continuously since he was a boy of six,[28] Kumar had a fund of affective experiences that propelled him towards renewing the festival post-Independence. In an April 2011 interview, Kumar shared how he became lead organiser of the festival, shaking it out of the doldrums it had fallen into, after being deeply struck by the dwindling numbers:

> There were only a few 100 people listening, when I visited the Harballabh in 1948, as I was also Superintendent of Police in Jalandhar at that time. Only two singers—Narayan Rao Vyas and Vinayak Rao Patwardhan were performing that year. The *mahant* (priest) of the Baba Harballabh Mahasabha Pt. Dwarka Dass, was ill, lying down on a *manji* (cot). He looked at me, and perhaps recognizing a kindred spirit, told me, 'Now you have to ensure the festival continues and thrives'.[29]

Given the sterling commitment of Kumar to the festival, he would have perhaps gone ahead and worked for its revival even without the mahant's blessing. But he *was* formally 'blessed', and along with leading Jalandhar merchant and philanthropist Seth Hukm Chand[30] steered the festival to its present-day eminence as a national festival. This story of optimistic revival reads like many other biographies of figures of that time who built institutions and renewed them in service of the nation: be it in education, urban infrastructure, industry, culture, constructive work in the villages and so on.[31] As Kumar went about his project of reviving the festival (to its halcyon days as he remembered them from his childhood), he began a process of institutional-building characteristic of the general enthusiasm with which India's anglophone middle classes reconstituted and defined anew the nation's valued cultural aspects.

Kumar introduced several new features in the organisation of the festival, re-galvanising financial support from the rich and powerful *bania* (trading) community of Jalandhar but also now from official state patrons, who as we just saw, were ever eager to come to the aid of classical music. Most of all, Kumar streamlined the functioning of the Sangeet Mahasabha, injecting it with new technicalities such

[28] In his interviews with the author, Kumar recalled travelling from Lahore to Jalandhar (also his birth town) along with other boys and men from his household on the insistence of his music-loving father, Dr Vishwa Nath, a famous physician who trained in England.

[29] Interview dated 18 February 2011.

[30] Seth Hukm Chand died in 1954 leaving the running of the festival entirely in Ashwini Kumar's hands. Shastri, *Trigartapardesh Jalandhar,* p. 125.

[31] In the field of education, one is reminded of the achievements of Sr. Karuna Mary Braganza, the first Indian Principal of Mumbai's Sophia College for Women, who unleashed a flurry of innovations in women's education during her years at the College. Refer Drego, *The Charism of Karuna*.

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as collecting ₹1 from each willing member of the audience. Capitalising on Keskar's zeal to popularise music,[32] Kumar utilised his proximity to government functionaries to ensure that the 'Shree Baba Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha' attained status as a charitable institution, with the result that donations to it were tax-exempt. Collecting donations from the audience members had a more fundamental purpose, beyond mere sustenance of the festival: the inculcation of a civic sense, spirit of ownership among Jalandharis that the festival *belonged* to them.[33] Donation slips from the early years function as emblems of civic voluntarism and are deeply cherished by present-day office bearers of the Sangeet Mahasabha. The difference between Kumar's ideas civic voluntarism and the earlier phase of voluntarily supporting the *mela* in the pre-1947 days is the element of 'benign coercion' exercised by Kumar on *behalf* of the 'people of Jalandhar'. Such a stance is similar to the role Keskar also cast himself in, as did the new Indian middle class that found itself in positions of governance and responsibility more broadly, during an idealistic era when such work was viewed as an exalted form of 'public service'.

However, there was no dearth of detractors of these changes. Many Harballabh patrons and audience members set great store by a Paluskarite obsequiousness (to the sacred *shaktī-pīṭh* site and to Baba Harballabh, in a way that made performing for a fee seem mercenary and worldly) towards the festival. The move to a more modern organisation implied professional musicians receiving their full due—which was technically the most conspicuous feature of the modernisation heralded by Ashwini Kumar. This was looked down upon by a fair number of Jalandhar residents involved with the festival, for whom, Kumar's patronage symbolised a crass monetisation, sullying the purity of the non-mercenary spirit of the past. His detractors initially viewed the thrust towards professionalisation in a largely negative vein. This set of changes is discussed in an article from the Urdu newspaper the *Hind Samachar* of 24 December 1982 by Jagannath Parti, a Jalandhar schoolteacher who founded the Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha in 1922 along with others. Parti laments the new practice of artistes demanding fees for performance, in violation of the hallowed traditions of performing out of devotion at the Harballabh:

> Prior to 1950, no fee was decided upon with any performer. *After 1950, first of all Ghulam Ali Khan Saheb asked for ₹3,000 which was agreed upon and procured by the President Shri Ashwini Kumar. Then, it became a routine thing.* Pandit Onkarnath, Pandit Vinayak Rao Patwardhan, Pandit Narayan Rao Vyas and Pandit Krishna Rao ji, who had *never asked for more than the travel fare*, now increased their demands because of their higher status. *The melon changes its colours after seeing another melon. The respect and honour for the Samadhi of Harivallabh began decreasing and the chain of bargaining began*.

[32] On the connections between Keskar's national agenda and Kumar's vision for the Harballabh, refer Kumar, 'A Festival of Music in the City of Sports', pp. 19–20.

[33] Interview dated 18 February 2011.

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> Like shopkeepers and customers, after exhibiting your work, the bargain comes to an end. The thing which causes amazement is that with every passing day, performers keep hiking their worth… Before 1950, performers used to stay at the Devi Talab and obtain their food from the *langar* there. But now they have need of grand hotels. *Along with the times, the mindset of each one has also changed.* Perhaps they think that Harivallabh is a tree on which instead of leaves, there grow notes of hundred-hundred rupees.[34]

Unfortunately, in the case of Parti, this monetisation is couched in communal terms, the blame being laid on Muslim musicians for the downhill slide towards a mercenary monetisation, rather than the uncertain conditions of a contracting patronage in the face of the abolition of the princely states. The year 1951 constituted another blow to hereditary performing musicians through the abolition of the *zamindari* system, which closed the traditional avenue of patronage by powerful zamindars. In keeping with Parti pointing the finger of blame towards Bade Ghulam Ali Khan,[35] an interview with the renowned Jalandhar-based sitar and string instrument maker Gurdial Singh[36] goes a step further in espousing a generalised prejudice towards Muslim musicians.[37] If one were to go by the logic of Parti's statement alone, and accept the date of 1950 as the beginning of the demand for performance fees, then a remarkable coincidence is evident, since 1950 is also the date for the abolition of the princely states and the disbursement of privy purses. This convergence clearly points to the end of the traditional channels of patronage, with either the AIR or public concerts becoming the only regular medium offering musicians continued support and a degree of respectability.

The cynical tone of Parti, 'they think that Harivallabh is a tree on which instead of leaves, there grow notes of hundred-hundred rupees', stems from the well-nurtured myth around the Devi Talab being a musical space beyond material benefit, a notion

[34] Bawra, *Harivallabh Darshan*, pp. 148–49. Emphasis added. Parti was also member of the 'Finance Sub-Committee' responsible for fundraising to be able to meet the fee demands of the artists. Parti's views were echoed even in the Souvenirs of the Mahasabha, for example, the report for 1970–71 notes the Secretary K.L. Jain's assertion that 'the expenses are increasing every year due to abnormal increase in the fees of the Artists. Such a state of affairs is rather unfortunate and should not be allowed to continue for all times to come'. However, he does not directly attack the artistes in the manner of Parti, proposing instead that 'a permanent source of income must be found out (*sic*) to run this unique and historic organisation, which provides a rich feast of music from the top ranking musicians to thousands of listeners every year without any admission fee'. Thus, K.L. Jain attached priority to the performers and listeners, recognising the need for a 'permanent' source of funds, unlike Parti, who believed in the utopia of Paluskar's era.

[35] The problematic categorisation of musical 'Ustads' in postcolonial India has been best dealt in Subramanian, 'Faith and the Musician'. I thank Yousuf Saeed for the reference.

[36] Singh learnt the art of string making from his uncle who in turn had shifted from Amritsar to Jalandhar on the invitation of the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya which required a music teacher.

[37] Interview dated 20 October 2011.

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strengthened by reformers like Paluskar who popularised the idea among twentieth-century performers that singing at the Harballabh was an act of devotion and not of virtuosic display alone.[38] In contrast, we can see both recognition of ground realities and a positive evaluation of monetisation in musicians' own narratives. Oral testimonies of the early days of the Harballabh by musicians mention how artistes would come to perform for free, sleeping on simple mats on the temple grounds, demanding almost no monetary compensation in return: at the most only their travel fare.[39] It was the period of Mr Ashwini Kumar's leadership which is presented by musicians as an era that launched the days of prosperity and adequate compensation for artists, establishing a more professional setting as opposed to the earlier days when more favourable employment conditions at princely states, such as, Patiala, Kapurthala, Jammu and so on, ensured that musicians could voluntarily participate at the Harballabh without any need of financial remuneration beyond travel reimbursements.

The modernisation heralded by Paluskar had as its premise the professionalisation of musical performance for and in the colonial public sphere, where remuneration for performance was necessary for a musician's success and respectability. Detractors like Parti desired retention of the veneer of pre-reform Harballabh with its legendary feature of performing purely for the divine, while simultaneously suppressing the context of this performance tradition—the spontaneous, non-professional orientation towards the abstract ideal of *bhaktī* and *ibādat*, listeners themselves being mystics and oftentimes musicians too. Despite the movement towards performance for middle-class audiences in colonial times, traditional avenues of patronage and employment had not yet dried up and participation in the festival required a reimbursement of travel fare at the most. The lure for most musicians was the added advantage of listening to other stalwarts, learning from their artistry and engaging in a musical conversation over 3–4 days. Post-1950, this enabling environment and ethos was no longer viable, and the professionalisation launched by Kumar and associates was the only route available (given the unequivocal changes wrought towards making the festival as a stage for 'national-level' performers) to ensure the Harballabh's survival. Organisers were expected, by those holding views akin to Parti, to theoretically continue the tradition of performance purely for *bhaktī* or devotion (for non-mercenary motivations) while in practice, to establish the Harballabh at par with the *best* music concerts of metropolitan India. The passion to preserve the Harballabh in the way it used to be, and to uphold 'tradition', clashed with a concomitant desire to modernise and nationalise the festival.

[38] Paluskar and his cohort could afford to idolise the Harballabh, making dramatic expressions of devotion by revoking any performance or travel fee (on the rare occasion when it was offered by Mahasabha authorities in the early twentieth century), because they had other sources of sustenance. Refer the section titled 'Pt. V. D. Paluskar discovers the Harballabh and vice versa' in Kapuria, 'A Muse for Music', Chapter 1, pp. 52–60.

[39] Interview with Ustad Sabri Khan dated 2 March 2011.

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The recurrence of this duality—which sought to retain features of performance that marked the Harballabh's earliest days while also modernising the logistics of organisation at par with the best national (and indeed international) conferences of music—is persistent in reporting and writing on the festival. I find Chatterjee's framework of the material–spiritual dichotomy within Indian nationalism apposite to understanding this duality.[40] Kumar's secularist, cosmopolitan and even internationalist stance[41] aimed to replicate the rationalised, professionalised and disciplined concert typical of the West (on which more below); other Harballabh enthusiasts wished to retain a concert that was primarily devotional, unsullied by the rigours of monetisation. A compromise is evident in the retention of the traditional practice of allowing free entry for listeners, unlike music festivals elsewhere in South Asia.[42]

Organisers also aimed to raise the festival to the standards of other more established classical music concerts of the country such as those in Maharashtra (Sawai Gandharva) and Bengal (Dover Lane), and, most eminently, the South (Madras Music Academy, December concert season), as well as reflect the growing prominence of Hindustani classical music on the international stage.[43] In the process of revival, therefore, the Harballabh had to acquire a new image—one which was in keeping with the high pedestal on which music was now beginning to find itself across India, especially the north. In the name of instituting a *revival* of the Harballabh to its initial glory days, this was a quintessentially modernist project, imparting a rather new meaning to what it meant to organise the Harballabh.

An important facet of Kumar's leadership phase was the irrevocable direction the festival took towards becoming an annual occasion for government officials to publicly proclaim their commitment to India and its rich culture. Such pronouncements allowed one to establish one's credentials as a representative of the new nation state. The earliest reference to this for the Harballabh is from the 1952 report where we find the following account of the experience of the chief guest, a state functionary:

[40] 'The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture'. This sentence neatly captures the tensions in the two sets of Harballabh organisers discussed here. Chatterjee, 'Whose Imagined Community?', p. 217.

[41] Throughout his life, Kumar exhibited an exceptional commitment to a broad South Asian secularism, reflected in his passion for music. The example of him surreptitiously subverting the Radcliffe line, to ensure Pakistani musician Roshanara Begum performed at the Harballabh in the 1950s, is illustrative of this. Kapuria, 'Unconquerable Nemesis', p. 91; Kapuria, 'Music and Its Many Memories', pp. 27–28. It was also during Kumar's tenure as President that the Hindustani vocalist from Afghanistan, Ustad Muhammad Hussain Sarahang, an expert of the Patiala *gharana* style, became a regular performer at the festival.

[42] According to Bawra, at one point in time when tickets were charged, the festival was a complete failure as hardly any audience members came. Bawra, *Harivallabh Darshan*, p. 44.

[43] During the late 1960s and 1970s onwards, given the international recognition being suddenly showered on Indian music, there was a concern with ensuring that the Harballabh showcased performers like Pt. Ravi Shankar. Shankar's first Harballabh performances were a turning point for the festival and vastly increased its popularity, according to Ashwini Kumar and others like Ustad Sabri Khan.

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> Lala Jagat Narain, Education Minister, (who) presided over the afternoon sitting yesterday… He shunned film songs and commended the ancient art as spiritually uplifting. '*Any efforts made towards the revival of the ancient art," he said, "would be a great national service'*.[44]

This example is characteristic of the festival in this new post-Independence era. A strong symbol of the state as 'new patron of the arts', the exalted government official became a consistent presence at the festival in post-independent India. Narain's assertion that the preservation of classical music is a form of service of the state, acts as a corollary to Keskar's view of it as the 'duty of the State', noted earlier.[45] While such statements were repeated *ad nauseam*, only a handful of state dignitaries were in actual fact genuinely passionate about their commitment to music. Some of the more profound pronouncements came from Keskar himself. In his capacity as Union Minister for Information, Keskar sent the following congratulatory note to the Sangeet Mahasabha for the 1954 Mela:

> I have great appreciation for the Musical Fair that you are holding. I wish more such fairs were organised in the country *to make music more popular*.[46]

For Keskar, classical music was the only pristine form of music worth patronising by the post-independent Indian state. This privileging of classical music alone, and putting it on a pedestal, as it were, went hand-in-hand with a crusading impulse to 'popularise' the classical among India's masses, by banning film music on AIR.[47] Chiming in with the Keskar's agenda to popularise classical music, the doyens of the Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha under the leadership of Ashwini Kumar also decided to utilise the now-increasing prestige of the festival to chart out an agenda for a wider pedagogical impact.[48] In 1956, a music academy was established at Jalandhar. After all, as per the souvenir for 1971 Pt. Paluskar was inspired by the Harballabh Mela to take the historic step of setting up his first and famous Gandharv Maha Vidyalaya at Lahore. K.C. Parashar, in a lucid article in *The Tribune* of 1961, tells us more about this newly formed academy of music:

[44] *The Tribune*, 31 December 1952, 'Punjab Music Conference Concludes', p. 3. Emphasis added.

[45] The presence of such state dignitaries was not unknown in the pre-1947 phase but was exceptional as in the rare occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's visit in 1919. In the later, more recent phase of the 1990s, this ubiquity of the 'VIP' becomes a matter for censure rather than commendation. Kapuria, 'Redefining Music's Sacrality'.

[46] *The Tribune*, Ambala, 28 December 1954, p. 2. Emphasis added.

[47] Lelyveld, 'Upon the Subdominant', pp. 119–21. For a more in-depth analysis of Keskar's policies, refer pp. 116–23.

[48] A newspaper report for the 1954 December festival tells us that the Sangeet Mahasabha had 'approached the State as well as the Union Governments for help in establishing a music university at Jalandhar (which was a seat of learning and classical music in ancient India)'. *The Tribune*, Ambala, 1 January 1955, p. 2.

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> A regular Sangeet Akademi was started by the Mahasabha in 1956. The Jalandhar Municipality, the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi and Punjab Government donated ₹3000, ₹2000 and ₹1000 respectively for its development. The Akademi is now affiliated to the Akhil Bhartiya Gandharb Mahavidyala Mandal of Bombay and Harivallabh is recognised as an examination centre.[49]

The music academy did not fare well, however, and had to close down by the 1970s. This was due to the consistent funding crunch the Sangeet Mahasabha faced, mainly due to its idealistic stance (symbolising the compromise between tradition and modernity we discussed above) of showcasing the 'best' of Indian classical music for free. On the other hand, the 1970s saw the beginning of another vital institution at the Harballabh music festival, which robustly continues till today. This was the competition for young students and children. Like other innovations, such as remuneration for music performances, the provision of hotel accommodation for the artistes and so on, this too was welcomed with disdain initially, but most Harballabhites went on to openly embrace the competition later on.[50]

The process of monetisation and professionalisation was undertaken by the Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha under Mr Kumar's leadership in a very transparent and democratic way, in the sense that Souvenirs, from 1966 onwards, exhibited the balance of receipts and expenditure for the previous years. This balance of accounts was exhibited along with a detailed report of the process of organising the previous year's festival, the contribution of each member of the Mahasabha and so on. What comes across starkly from these accounts is the fact that despite the magnanimous offers made by the government officials throughout this period, the lion's share of funding coming from donations by Jalandhar's residents.

Thus for the year 1970–71, of the total grant-in-aid received—₹56,409.58—the Municipal Committee of Jalandhar donated a meagre ₹3,000 and ₹5,000 from the Punjab State Government, a bare 14 per cent of the total pie. The 'donations' on the other hand alone account for ₹48,409.58, a whopping 85 per cent of the entire funds raised.[51] The large share of total donations offered by Jalandhar residents was

[49] *The Sunday Tribune*, Magazine Section, 31 December 1961, p. 4.

[50] For the first competition held in 1977, Bawra derisively remarked: 'Who would go to listen two days of a rasa-deprived programme? Such competitions in any case take place commonly in colleges and universities. On the high-level stage of the Harballabh, *such a competition has no special place*. No listeners came from outside either'. Bawra, *Harivallabh Darshan*, p. 123. Note the concern with losing listeners 'from outside' Jalandhar.

[51] 'Shree Baba Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha, Income and Expenditure Account, For the Year Ending 31 March 1971', in the *Souvenir for the 96th Sangeet Sammelan* held in January 1972. The corresponding proportions for the year ending 31 March 1972 are as follows: 16 per cent from the Municipal Committee, Jalandhar and the Punjab State Government, while the majority comes from donations again, that is, 74.45 per cent. For the year ending 31 March 1976, the figures are 17 and 82 per cent, respectively. These figures are reproduced from the available Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure Statements published in some editions of the Sangeet Mahasabha Souvenirs.

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borne by the industrial scions of the city, most of whom had built their industries on the earlier, pre-existing industrial base owned by Jalandhar's Muslims pre-1947.[52] The owners of these industries belonged to the upper caste, middle-class groups of Jalandhar, a continuity with the composition of the group of educated notable elites of Jalandhar who had formed the Sangeet Mahasabha in 1922. This continuity stemmed from the special, affective place of the Harballabh music festival in the lives of this broad social group, tied to notions of a new respectability attached to music as a national treasure and a Paluskarite passion to preserve it.

However, modernisation was unmistakably visible in at least one sphere: the use of state defence agencies to discipline increasingly huge crowds attending the Harballabh. In the decade before Independence, volunteer groups belonging to Hindu organisations maintained order, such as by the *Hindu Sewak Sabha* and *Krishna Dal* at the 1937 Conference.[53] With independence and the shift of leadership from the Devi Talab *mahants* to Mr Kumar, this began to change, with the presence of groups linked to arms of state becoming more visible. A report from 1952, a year which heralds the initial days of Kumar's stewardship, reflects this shift from the past in stark terms:

> The 'pandal' was packed to capacity on the last day. *The volunteers of the Home Defence Department maintained order*... Master Jagan Nath Passi traced the history of the conference... The Sabha, he said, has now 200 members. Pt. Ashwini Kumar, Principal, Police Training School, Phillaur, is its President....[54]

The above report tells us that 'the pandal was packed to capacity', to such an extent, indeed, that order had to be maintained by 'volunteers of the Home Defence Department', a sign of a new deference that state outfits had for this music *mela*. It is clear that Ashwini Kumar, the newly ordained President of the Sangeet Mahasabha and Principal of a Police Training School at the nearby city of Phillaur, is the man responsible for their presence, as also the increased population of Sangeet Mahasabha members. The meaning of the role of Ashwini Kumar in the annals of the Harballabh is also evident in J.S. Bawra's account of the pre-1947 period of the festival based on Parti's testimony which appeared on 22 December 1981 in the *Hind Samachar*. In Parti's account, as quoted by Bawra, the issue of large and rowdy crowds is seriously raised in only one instance:

[52] Regular donors from industrial houses of Jalandhar included Leader Engineering Works, Amin Chand Pyare Lal, Seth and Shah Traders, Kalsi Metal Works, Jagdambay Engg. & Welding Works, Goverdhan Dass P.A. Jalandhar. Many of the scions of these industrial houses (such as D.D. Sehgal of Leader Works) were members of the Sangeet Mahasabha. Firms from Delhi and Bombay also contributed. Refer *Souvenir for the 96th Sangeet Sammelan.*

[53] Kapuria, 'A Muse for Music', Chapter 1, p. 82.

[54] *The Tribune*, Ambala Cantt., 31 December 1952 'Punjab Music Conference Concludes', p. 3. Emphasis added.

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> After 1935, this festival became a centre of great attraction due to its popularity. The crowds began increasing and the tent-space was not enough, some mischievous elements would also join. *Due to the crowds, there would also be some physical brawls*. Ashwini Kumar, who was the Principal of the Police Training School at Phillaur at that time, took the organisation of this festival in his hands. *Now the mela began to take place in an open field under a huge tent*.[55]

Interesting here is the consummate ease with which Parti, after alluding to physical brawls due to the swelling of crowd numbers post-1935, leaps more than 15 years into the future by asserting how Ashwini Kumar alone was capable of bringing the requisite discipline to this unruly festival, given his stature as Principal of a Police Training School. Kumar's training as a policeman was also evident in a more esoteric realm: in his attempts towards instilling in the Harballabh audiences, the quality of attentive and intelligent listening.

The 'Fabled' Space of Performance at the Harballabh

> The use of music as a kind of ambrosia to titillate the aural senses, while one's conscious mind is otherwise occupied is something *extremely hateful*.[56]
>
> —Ashwini Kumar

> The Harballabh people *know how to listen*. They know the difference between musicians and circus performers. You can't fool them. *They are not like the puppet audiences of Delhi*.[57]
>
> —Kesarbai Kerkar, paraphrased by Sheila Dhar

The professionalisation begun by Ashwini Kumar was not restricted to the physical aspects of organising the festival alone insofar as they concerned payment of fees to musicians, and accountability on the part of middle-class patrons. Kumar's ambitious drive also sought to professionalise, or discipline, the Harballabh's audiences too, transforming them into appreciative listeners, schooled in rapt and deliberative listening practices.[58]

The above remarks of Ashwini Kumar give us an inkling into the motivations behind the modernisation process he undertook. For it was only through such a process that his intention of creating an atmosphere conducive to serious, contemplative performance and listening could be fulfilled. The changes wrought by Kumar were thus grounded in a sensitive understanding of the procedure for listening to and performing music.

[55] Bawra, *Harivallabh Darshan*, p. 147. Emphasis added.
[56] *Ibid*., p. 15. Emphasis added.
[57] Dhar, 'The Muse and the Truck Drivers', p. 177. Emphasis added.
[58] DeNora, 'Culture and Music', pp. 146–47.

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> I have noticed that audiences show no more than a lukewarm interest *when the musician is at his best*, when he is finely portraying a Raga. But let him come to his antics, to his *Sargams* and interminable *Tanas* and the audiences are *electrified and wild with excitement*. No wonder, the musician finds in this enthusiastic reception a confirmation of his views and gives the public more and more of these flourishes.[59]

Kumar's effort was to ensure that the best of music was produced at all times, something which could occur only when both musician and listener were both equally earnest. Indeed, he emphasised the importance of ensuring not just the listener, but equally, the musician also being trained on this front.[60] For Kumar, the entire process is one where music creates a new world shared by both performer and listener sketched out in detail as follows:

> *A successful musical performance has a hypnotic effect on the listener.* It detaches him from his surroundings and carries him into the world of absolute sensation… What is the business of a musician then? *It is to see that the magic he has cast on his listeners does not break and the pleasing sensation continues till the end*.[61]

The focus for Kumar is therefore to enter a kind of contemplative reverie as listener. With its traditional *baithak* style of seating, the Harballabh under Kumar strove to retain this kind of pure listening experience, celebrated by music connoisseur Raghava Menon.[62] Clearly then, for Kumar, the primary motive in patronising and running the festival was a desire to foster music itself, and not the pursuit of social status or indeed paying lip service to the state's espousal of classical music.[63] Creating such an environment for the listening of music was the priority for him, and the Harballabh was the best place and space for him to do so. This is evident in the quotation below, where he reiterates the importance of consistently providing Harballabh audiences with a flow music, so they could be trained to appreciate 'great music':

> Ears, then, and training are what are needed if one is to acquire an appreciation of music. *Sometimes the training comes from living in the midst of music until*

[59] Kumar, *Casual Symphony*, pp. 23–24.

[60] *Ibid*.

[61] *Ibid*., p. 20. Emphasis added.

[62] 'Before electronic amplification… *the audience listened with such intense and total attention which was a kind of attending in which all the five senses of the listener participated equally, so that every performance could be remembered and recalled with a kind of physical intimacy and a striking fidelity to nuance and feeling, sometime for years after the concert*'. Menon, *Indian Music*, p. 11, emphasis added. Bawra's account also has several instances where the stillness stemming from the magic of the music has the entire audience spell-bound, especially refer Bawra, *Harivallabh Darpan*, p. 138 and p. 153.

[63] Wade, 'Patronage in India's Musical Culture', pp. 181–92.

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> *it is absorbed without effort*…Trying to appreciate music, however, *without having music to appreciate is like learning to swim without water*…Music must be provided and in such a way that it must be heard repeatedly. *Familiarity may breed contempt, but not in the case of great music*.[64]

Indeed, his belief that training comes unconsciously, merely by living in a musical environment 'until it is absorbed without effort', does seem to address itself directly to the Harballah itself. Kumar may indeed have had in mind the Madras *katcherīs* of Carnatic music, where, in Lakshmi Subramanian's words, new 'virtues of standardization, spiritual regeneration, and authenticity became the guidelines for the emerging agenda of cultural reconstruction that developed explicitly nationalist overtones over time'.[65]

In many ways, it was this pedagogical function that united the organisers in a common passion to disseminate the intricacies and joys of listening to classical music—as an art in itself—to lay people. A close-knit organisational group very clearly articulated this pedagogic function, proactively building the Harballabh up on the lines of the south Indian *katcheri* mentioned by Subramanian above. An illustration of this is Bawra mentioning the vignette of how Ashwini Kumar shares an interesting musical anecdote—which establishes music as the root of all other art forms—whether dance, painting or sculpture—during one of the organisational meetings of the core team behind the Harballabh.[66] This is a concrete example of Kumar's impulse to ensure that the core group of organisers recognised the fundamental necessity of music for the development of all other artistic endeavour.

Despite the frustration Kumar expressed about the penchant of Harballabh audiences of the 1960s and 1970s for only superficial musical antics, he recalled and idealised the prodigious peasant listeners of his childhood, whose knowledge of the classical idiom apparently matched that of the great maestros:

> I remember the scenes of the Harballabh from my childhood: people would come in thousands to listen to the three nights of music; and me and my brother would be especially sent from Lahore by our music-lover of a father. I clearly recollect how a peasant member of the audience stood up and interrupted one of the ustads, saying *'twādī eh wālī shrutī ṭhīk trāhṅ nahi lagī'* (you didn't strike that particular *shrutī* very well).[67]

[64] Kumar, *Casual Symphony*, pp. 11–12. Emphasis added.

[65] Subramanian, *From the Tanjore Court,* p. 74.

[66] Bawra, *Harivallabh Darpan*, p. 110.

[67] Interview dated 18 February 2011. Demographically, the rural population in Jalandhar *tahsil* has always been substantial around 85 per cent between 1881 and 1911 (*Punjab District Gazetteers, Volume XIV B, Jalandhar District, Statistical Tables 1916,* p. x). Jalandhar has always been a densely populated area, and post-partition, it was recorded as the most densely populated one of eastern Punjab. Further, as per the 1971 census (relevant for this period of the Harballabh), rural density per sq. km was highest for Jalandhar tahsil at 353, as opposed to the other tahsils Nawanshahr (320), Phillaur (328) and Nakodar

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This image of the anonymous yet well-informed peasant, aware of the intricacies of classical music, one who would travel on bullock cart from a far-off village with bed and bedding in tow, to be immersed in music, recurs in other accounts as well.[68] On this already existing historical ground boasting knowledgeable audiences, an even more vibrant, self-aware and educated tradition of listening could be fostered. Harballabh audiences (or the section that remained in Jalandhar post-partition) merely needed to be reminded of their past greatness, when 'rural', 'unlettered' folk had been inadvertently trained, by the simple expedient of attending the festival year-after-year, to 'appreciate music' by default, purely 'from living in the midst of music until it is absorbed without effort'. The anecdote also illustrates how Kumar viewed his mission as slowly transforming contemporary audience members into the 'peasant-connoisseurs' of old, a vision imbued with the Gandhian idealisation of village life and rural culture, popular during the 1920s and 1930s—the decades of his childhood.

The eclectic composition of the audience and the singularity of the listening experience at the Harballabh are eloquently described by others as well. Some of the most descriptive and entertaining words about the festival were written by musician and author Sheila Dhar, who also built on Ashwini Kumar's image of 'rustic' peasant-connoisseurs:

> *The audiences were huge and did not consist of the sort of elite one associated with classical music elsewhere.* There were farmers, truck drivers, shopkeepers, fruit growers, small mechanics, big industrialists, journalists, and businessmen of all sorts. Most of them came with their families, bringing blankets and food, in the spirit of pilgrims on the road, happily prepared to weather all hardships, the bitter cold and the lack of sleep for three nights in expectation of the musical benedictions the festival offered.[69]

The eclectic background of the listeners went hand-in-hand with another well-renowned myth about the *content* of music that the audience of Jalandhar preferred, for which we again have the following incisive remarks by Sheila Dhar:

> *The ears of the local people, who were otherwise extremely simple,* had been *nurtured and conditioned since the origin of the festival to appreciate only the purest classical idiom* of khayal and dhrupad… *These audiences were not delicate in their responses. Their approval and disapproval were both clearly*

(233). Refer *Punjab District Gazetteers, Jalandhar*, 1980, pp. 63–64. This qualifies to a degree, the claims of many commentators about large number of peasants at the fair at least up to the late 1970s.

[68] This raises bigger questions about the (ir)relevance of both the folk–classical binary in Hindustani music and stereotypes of 'rustic' Punjabis, which is beyond our scope here. For our present purposes, it is the function of the anecdote in Kumar's own narratives that is important.

[69] Dhar, 'The Muse and the Truck Drivers', pp. 178–80. Emphasis added.

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> *expressed*. As Kesar Bai had put it, '…They want each sound to be explicit and healthy, like their own temperaments'.[70]

Dhar reinforces the image of the reception of music by the audience, depicting them as simple, primitive, yet possessed with 'ears' well-trained for listening and a great sensitivity towards the intricacies of classical music. Dhar's writing on the Harballabh audiences is paternalistic, rife with cultural stereotypes about the Punjabis as an essentially rural people (given they were 'not delicate in their responses', wanting 'each sound to be explicit and healthy, like their own temperaments') communicated to her by Kesarbai. That Dhar also upholds this stereotype independently of Kesarbai is evident earlier in the essay, when she narrates her father's incredulous question to Kesarbai: '"But isn't this place, Harballabh, in the Punjab, near Jalandhar of all places?" my father had asked patronizingly, as though serious music and Punjab were incompatible'.[71]

The audience could also be collectively mesmerised by a crowd favourite to such a degree that appreciating an otherwise soul-stirring performance by an artiste already on stage was rendered impossible. One of the most vivid anecdotes in this regard is narrated by Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, when he performed at the Harballabh in 1965:

> An Army General, who became very famous during the war walked in my concert and seeing him people started shouting 'General Dhillon Zindabad'. It began softly and gradually became very loud. The General walked up to my stage and took the mike and addressed the audience in Punjabi, '*Bhaion Beheno! ye ranchetra da maidan naheen hai, main itthe Khan saheb da Sarod sunan aya see* so please keep quiet' (Brothers and sisters! This is not a war front, I am here to listen to Khan Saheb). I had stopped at this point but the General sat with me on the stage through the concert as I commenced.[72]

Apart from revealing the audience's obsession with a particularly jingoistic form of patriotism at the festival, the anecdote consolidates the *mela* character of the festival, where audiences are inherently undisciplined. Interestingly, General Dhillon creatively resolved the combustible situation by sitting with a young Amjad Ali Khan on stage itself—thereby appeasing both the audience on the one hand, and the organisers and musicians on the other. The volubility of the audience is also echoed in from Bawra's account, where we find consistent references to the fact that the *tabla*, that loud and robust instrument, evokes the loudest cheers from the audience.[73]

[70] *Ibid.*, Emphasis added.

[71] *Ibid*., p. 177.

[72] Khan, 'The Maestro Speaks'.

[73] Perhaps this can be said to corroborate Mr Kumar's twin disdain for the excessive virtuosity and gymnastics of the musicians as well as audience members, who, too appreciated such calisthenics without focussing on conveying the whole meaning and emotion behind the raga rendition.

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The uniqueness of the Harballabh audiences was also visible in them braving the extreme cold and rain over successive years, in order to enjoy music against all odds.[74] Given these levels of commitment on behalf of the listeners, the festival has often been described in religious terms and seen as a pilgrimage of sorts, since many listeners would also come to the Harballabh from outside Jalandhar. The element of faith in the festival and the prevalent superstition in the music fraternity that fame comes to those who perform and seek blessings at the spot of Harballabh is also asserted in Dhar's memoir:

> I knew that musicians and listeners came to the festival from all over the country *as though it were a pilgrimage and the venue harboured a widespread superstition that whoever came to the shrine to pay their respects would become successful and famous*. Ravi Shankar and Onkar Nath Thakur were often cited as examples.[75]

Dhar further informs readers how 'the vastness of the numbers paralysed'[76] her momentarily; given that compared to the small audiences typical of more manicured urbane settings, the Harballabh retained a *melā*-like flavour in the 1960s and even 1970s. The Harballabh, through such perceptions held by its patrons and performers, became one of the few places through which classical music could claim an organic link with the people. These 'peasant-connoisseurs' were certainly not limited to Punjab and were similar to the rural nature of other listening publics for classically oriented music in South Asia, whether *nāṭyasangīt* in the Deccan or *kobīgān* in Bengal.[77]

The world of performance and consumption at the Harballabh was thus valued as being unique, as a kind of 'fabled' spot. In spelling out its uniqueness as compared to other music conferences across a newly independent India, Ashwini Kumar worked to have the Harballabh defined as one of the few spaces for classical musical performance in South Asia where an organic link with the masses was palpable. The Harballabh's links with a popular consciousness further entrenched its place among the few distinctively 'popular' music conferences of Hindustani music.[78] The idealisation of 'peasant-connoisseur' listeners at the Harballabh, and the organic link between music and the masses this signifies, was also intimately

[74] Dhar, 'The Muse and the Truck Drivers', pp. 178–80. Refer also the report for the 1977 festival in Bawra, *Harivallabh Darshan*, p. 133.

[75] Dhar, 'The Muse', pp. 178–79. Emphasis added.

[76] *Ibid.,* p. 193.

[77] On *nāṭyasangīt*, refer Nadkarni, 'Marathi Natya Sangeet'; and on *kobīgān*, refer Basu, 'Bengali Kobigan'.

[78] Among other popular Hindustani music conferences in contemporary to the Harballabh during the 1950s in India were the Sawai Gandharva (Pune), the Dover Lane (Kolkata) and the Tansen Festival (Gwalior). However, the audiences at these festivals were most often comprised of urban middle classes, in contrast to the far more eclectic mix of rural and urban listeners at the Harballabh.

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linked with the valorisation of rural folk as unspoilt and more authentic, in the version of Indian nationalism popular during the 1950s and 1960s.

From the late 1970s onwards, however, this characteristic of the *mela* as a paragon of classical music conferences began to wane. One of the reasons for the slump in its predominance, at least in the Punjab, was the establishment of Chandigarh as capital in the 1960s and its concomitant ascension as a new cultural hub by the 1970s. At the spot of the Devi Talab itself, however, more thoroughgoing changes were afoot, which were to completely alter both the geographical space and symbolic world of the Harballabh.

Emergence of the Temple and Shifts in the Festival's Iconography

While the roots of the festival lay in a cosmopolitan Hindu devotional context, the catholicity of this phase was in direct contrast to the seeming 'return' to Hindu religiosity and devotionalism in the 1970s. 1969 and 1970 saw a mobilisation drive by some residents of Jalandhar under the leadership of Mohan Lal Chopra and Dwarka Dass Sehgal, to build a vast new temple at the Devi Talab *shaktī-pīṭh* grounds. Interestingly, the main source for our reconstruction of the Harballabh's history, J.S. Bawra, provides no mention of the building of the temple.[79] The major primary source available for writing the temple's history then is the *Trigartapardesh Jalandhar*, also perhaps the only full-fledged book on the history of Jalandhar. The book is extensively peppered with vitriol against Muslims, describing every aspect of the city's Islamic history in derogatory terms. We also get a preliminary account of the renovation (*navnirmān*) of the temple at the Devi Talab. It is expressly concerned with delineating the ancient origins of the city of Jalandhar, emphasising the mythological and religious importance of the city. Given that today the temple at Devi Talab is the single biggest temple of the city, apart from its enormous significance as a *shaktī-pīṭh* site, the renovation of this temple during the 1970s is of great import to Shastri's entire account and he provides the reader with ample details.

According to Shastri, efforts at renovating the small, pre-existing temple[80] and replenishing the dry pond with water were made repeatedly in the history of the site. Skipping over the developments in the pre-1947 period, Swami emphasises the arrival of an itinerant and relatively unknown 'swami' the 1950s to raise the temple again.[81] These are Shastri's comments on temple building:

[79] Bawra only mentions that D.D. Sahgal helped with the running of the festival, taking no note of the fact that he played an instrumental role in the organisation for constructing the temple.

[80] Up to the 1970s, the only existing temple was located on the corner of the 'dry' pond, and the entirety of the Devi Talab grounds was packed with audiences during the Harballabh festival.

[81] Interestingly, there is a parallel here with Baba Hem Giri, guru of Tulja Giri, who in turn was the 'preceptor' of Baba Harballabh, who was invited from Hoshiarpur in order to take over the *shaktī-pīṭh* site from the apparent encroachment of a Muslim saint Shah Sikandar. Kapuria, 'A Muse for Music', Chapter 1, pp. 36, 47–48, 51–52.; Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics*, pp. 61–63.

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> From 1957 to 1969, i.e. for twelve years the pillars kept standing in the same way, nobody gave attention in this direction. Despite the fact that inside this *talab* innumerous Harivallabh Sammelans have taken place—*those people also kept themselves limited to Raag Sammelans only*. Never ever did they speak about its renovation. This was in a way a matter of *great shame* for the people of Jalandhar.[82]

Here, we can clearly note the tone of resentment with which Shastri speaks of the organisers of the sangeet sammelans, as though they were using the spot without giving it its proper due. Interviews with Ashwini Kumar have revealed that he himself was not keen on getting the temple built. Instead, in an inspired move, the residents of Jalandhar pleaded with his mother, who being of a religious bent of mind. She agreed to bestow her consent on the building of the temple on land which was in her name ever since Mahant Dwarka Dass had, on his death bed, handed over the control and running of this festival to Ashwini Kumar. One could surmise that perhaps Kumar was aware of the aural environment at the already existing Hindu temples patronised by Jalandhar's Hindu elite, hence his reluctance in letting the Harballabh grounds being turned into yet another conventional temple complex with all its attendant noise and rituals, so inimical to the 'rarefied' music festival he wanted to build.

Ashwini Kumar's reluctance to allow a temple to be built[83] seems to be an aberration among others involved in the festival, a sharp contrast to the enthusiasm with which other patron-elites—some of whom were eminent Jalandhar industrialists—responded to the call for setting up a temple. For them, support for the Harballabh Music Festival had an important sacral aspect, and many patrons of the Harballabh came forward enthusiastically to build the temple as an act of piety. Kumar's apathy towards temple construction was thus only the exception that highlighted the rule. The first meetings of the Temple Committee took place at Leader Engineering Works, whose chief was Lala Dwarka Dass Sahgal, a stalwart member of the Sangeet Mahasabha instrumental in the collection of funds to run the festival. In the Balance Sheet of the Sangeet Mahasabha on 31 March 1976, we find a curious head, apart from 'Academy and Other Project Fund' (totalling ₹53,374.01) and 'Auditorium Grant' (earmarked at ₹10,000) titled 'Mandir Building Fund' (last balance of ₹7,506).[84] Therefore, the Sangeet Mahasabha *itself* played a significant though small role in the building of the temple. However, passive the support of Ashwini Kumar, he was clearly not actively antagonistic to the project, given that his colleagues in the Sangeet Mahasabha supported it so strongly.

By 1972, the roof of the temple structure had been laid, and the completed building installed with idols in February 1975. Shastri emphasises the role played by the

[82] Shastri, *Trigartapardesh Jalandhar,* p. 76. Emphasis added.
[83] Personal communication dated 10 April 2011.
[84] Balance Sheet for 1976, published in the Souvenir for that year.

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common lay people of Jalandhar, who donated small, individual amounts for the building of the temple right up to the installation of idols. This was reminiscent of the way in which this same social group of people—largely upper caste and middle class—contributed to the running of Harballabh in its early days. The emergence of the temple inaugurated a whole set of new changes in the self-representation of the festival, not simply in the physical and spatial configuration at the Devi Talab. It also heralded an ever more conspicuous presence of Hindu temple devotional iconography in the yearly souvenirs published by the Sangeet Mahasabha. Visually, this is apparent in the souvenir covers from the Festival of December 1976 (101st Sangeet Sammelan) which clearly figure a sketch of the newly built temple forming the backdrop for the foreground of the Goddess Saraswati. The same image was repeated for all following years, also found on the cover for the 1980 Festival reproduced here **(**Figure 1**)**. Hitherto, the Goddess Saraswati had appeared only once (in 1967) and that too singularly in all her glory, with nothing in the background.

For the immediately preceding festival held in January 1976, we find a rare portrayal of a Mirabai-like figure on the cover (Figure 2). For the year 1966, when the first Souvenir was printed, there is a thirteenth-century cymbal player photographed from the Konark temples at Orissa, while for 1972 January and December festivals, a creative abstract pattern on the cover. However, beginning with December 1976, this diversity of representations on the cover was subsumed by the uniform and monolithic image of the Goddess Saraswati, not alone, but *alongside* the new Devi Talab temple in the background. This shift towards a uniformity of representation highlights for us just how important the temple was in the sacred geography of the Devi Talab as imagined by the majority of the members of the Sangeet Mahasabha. Sumathi Ramaswamy has charted the pervasiveness of the icon of Bharat Mata or 'Mother India' in colonial India as a novel visual and affective embodiment of national territory, in media ranging from print to painting. She also notes the steadily Hindu *avatar* it acquired by the eve of Independence.[85] In a similar way, the construction of a new, massive temple on an older Hindu sacred site, such as, the Devi Talab, utilised the visual iconography of the goddess to reshape the identity of the festival as part of a new, specifically Hindu nation.

Thus, the context for performance itself was slowly becoming unmistakably and conspicuously Hinduised, as is evident in some of the performances of Pt. Jasraj in 1977, which conspicuously featured invocations to the Goddesses Kali and Durga.[86] Increased Hinduisation can also be viewed as a reaction to Sikh communal consolidation through the Khalistani movement of the 1980s, a time of flux when the definition of who is a Punjabi or what constitutes Punjabiyat became increasingly contentious, especially so for East Punjab's Hindu minority. [87] At

[85] Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*, p. 71.

[86] *Ibid*., p. 142 and p. 145.

[87] On the deteriorating relations between Hindus and Sikhs during the 1980s, refer Chima, *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency*, pp. 68, 89, 135.

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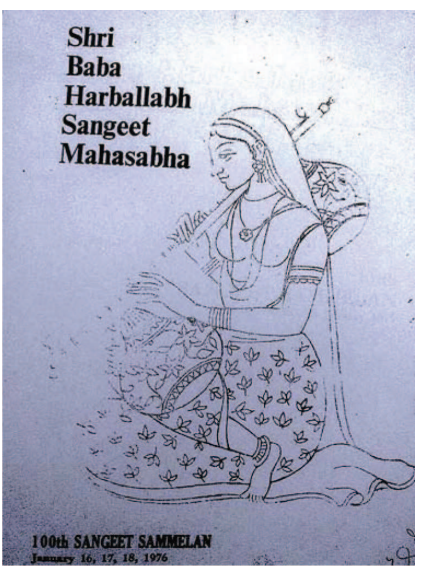
Figure 1. The Sangeet Sammelan Souvenir for 1980, Replicating the Covers from 1976 to 1979 (note the newly constructed Devi Talab temple now an equally prominent place as the Goddess Saraswati).

Source: Shree Baba Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha Festival Souvenir for 1980.

Figure 2. The Souvenir for the January 1976 Sammelan Featuring an Abstract Female Figure with a Stringed Instrument Representing the Harballabh Festival, as Was the Case for 1967



Source: Shree Baba Harballabh Sangeet Mahasabha Festival Souvenir for 1976.

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the peak of the Khalistani movement, the festival was suspended almost wholly: except for the year 1985, no festival took place in the 4 years between 1984 and 1988. Compounded with this cessation of the festival was Mr Ashwini Kumar's effective retirement from Presidentship of the Sangeet Mahasabha in 1982 and shift of residence to Delhi. The festival only recommenced in 1989,[88] entering an excessively Hinduised phase, marked by a rehearsed emphasis on rituals such as the Saraswati Vandana and the *havan*,[89] combined with increasing antagonism between the Sangeet Mahasabha and the Temple Committee, given the steady colonisation of the Devi Talab grounds by the latter.[90]

Conclusion

I have traced the distinctive post-Independence location of the Harballabh festival at the interstices of regional origins and national eminence, sacrality and secularism, and official state patronage and middle-class sponsorship, shedding light more broadly on the material, symbolic and discursive components of cultural politics in independent India. In the face of change and a ruptured sociocultural fabric in the urban landscape of Jalandhar, the Harballabh slowly emerged as one of the few institutions that could rightfully claim to represent both the old and the new. During this post-Independence phase, it stood as exemplary representative of tradition refurbished for the glory of a newly independent modern nation state, in tune with the larger trend pertaining to institutions of 'classical' Indian culture across the country.

The systematic way in which Ashwini Kumar professionalised and monetised performance at the festival, bringing renowned names from a newly prestigious world of classical music to perform at the Harballabh, built up its reputation as a nationally renowned stage. The tenor of Kumar's patronage, given its deep springs in a musical commitment stemming from an association with the festival since childhood, gave a profound, national-level dignity to the Harballabh during these four decades. Kumar sought to situate the festival as a place where music performance would be, to use Edward Said's formulation, 'an extreme occasion', rarefied and perceivably dissonant with everyday life, 'rather like an athletic event in its demand for the admiringly rapt attention of its spectators'.[91] Given Kumar's parallel passion as a sports administrator, Said's statement is especially applicable to the organisation of the Harballabh festival.

However, as we saw, Kumar's idealistic vision around creating an exceptional music festival with the highest listening standards was disrupted by the more

[88] The festival was revived courtesy the efforts of the North Zone Cultural Centre based in Patiala.

[89] The Saraswati Vandana is a musical invocation to the goddess of knowledge and music, Saraswati, which in the 1990s was performed exclusively by female students at the Harballabh. The *havan* is a Hindu ritual that consists of making offerings into a consecrated fire.

[90] This process is more fully delineated in Kapuria, 'Redefining Music's Sacrality'.

[91] Said, *Musical Elaborations*, p. 2.

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mixed audience at the Harballabh. As per anecdotal examples from Sheila Dhar and Amjad Ali Khan, it is clear the audience often imposed their own standards on music, subverting Kumar's agenda towards inducing the normative standards borrowed from the western concert experience at the Harballabh.

Further, the tenor of Kumar's modernisation was *not* steeped in excessive Hindu devotionalism and ritualism, but rather in a passion for nurturing good music, evocative of the broadly eclectic and cosmopolitan cultural sphere of the colonial Lahore in which he had grown up. The best evidence of this eclectic and cosmopolitan outlook on music performance and consumption is an article titled 'Contribution of the Punjab to Indian Music'[92] in which Kumar narrates the contribution of different groups, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim, to the music of Punjab with remarkable objectivity, unlike the melodramatic account of Bawra which constructs the familiar myth of a 'Hindu golden past' of music.[93] Kumar's account also stands out in sharp contrast to the anti-Muslim stance of Keskar, who upheld the Hindu nationalist vision of Paluskar, predictably laying the blame for Indian music's apparent degeneration on the shoulders of north Indian Muslims.[94]

Only a man of letters and connoisseur of music like Kumar, a patron in the primary sense, who gave priority to patronising *music* itself—as evinced in his passion to nurture a new culture of intelligent and active listening—could pave the way for the Harballabh to scale the heights it did in these years. Bonnie Wade's demarcation of the different motivations behind the patronage of India's musical cultures is useful to fully recognise this character of Kumar's patronage (Table 1). Kumar's services to the Harballabh did not stem from a desire to earn religious merit, but out of a passion for maintaining a tradition of listening to and performing a profound variety of music. This was as much a part of what Wade terms the 'direct process' of fostering music as the 'indirect' one of upholding 'cultural status'—the only two axes wherein 'patronage of music' is of precedence, and not 'patronage of musician' alone. In attaching priority to music per se, and not to social status or religious merit, Kumar generally formed the exception to the rule of patronage of the festival—both preceding and following his tenure as Sangeet Mahasabha President—that primarily viewed involvement with the Harballabh as a means to earn religious or social merit.[95] For the majority of his colleagues in the Sangeet Mahasabha, including a handful of Jalandhar's original Hindu inhabitants and a score of new Hindu–Sikh refugees from West Punjab (now Pakistan), the older associations of music with religious or social merit (that had coexisted with a cross-religious composition of both performers and audience, something that was

[92] Reproduced in the Souvenir for the 101st Sangeet Sammelan of 1976, pp. 1–4.

[93] For Bawra's descriptions, refer Kapuria, 'Rethinking Musical Pasts'. The secularist stance adopted by Kumar towards music was also echoed more widely in state policy of this time as well; refer Rajagopalachari's views, *The Tribune*, Ambala, 28 December 1954, p. 2.

[94] Lelyveld, 'Upon the Subdominant', p. 117.

[95] Kapuria, 'A Muse for Music', Chapter 1, pp. 41–46.

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Table 1 Motivators for Musical Patronage

	Motivation of Patron	Action	Result
Direct process	Fostering of music	Patronage of music	Patronage of musician
Indirect process	Entertainment	Patronage of musician	Patronage of music
	Social status	Patronage of musician	Patronage of musician
	Cultural status	Patronage of music	Patronage of musician
	Political rank/ status	Patronage of musician	Patronage of music
	Practice of religion	Patronage of musician	Patronage of music

Source: Wade, 'Patronage in India's Musical Culture', 1992.

increasingly imperilled during the post-1947 phase), coalesced in equal measure with what was often only an incidental appreciation of music.

As a deeply committed citizen connoisseur who took up the mantle of running this festival, hitherto in the hands of the temple *mahants*, Kumar infused a new meaning to organising the festival. While there was a secular thrust to the Harballabh in this era thanks to Ashwini Kumar's commitments, this was closely allied with the official state discourse of secularism, very different from the eclectic version of the Harballabh's early days. Kumar's secularism, as it was played out at the local Jalandhar level, was in many ways analogous to Pt. V.N. Bhatkhande's for the larger sphere of Indian classical music more generally.[96] Despite his secular zeal, Kumar could not find the ingenuity to wholly subvert Paluskar's vision of music, which on the whole, continues to make its presence felt at the Harballabh up to the present.[97]

Further, the highly prestigious public offices he held throughout his life (noted above, footnote 28) constrained the fuller role he could have played. Given Kumar's many professional preoccupations, music never became his sole priority, another reason being that music now thrived in school and graduate education, opening up other patronage venues for those wishing to dedicate their lives teaching music.

[96] Pt. V.N. Bhatkhande (1860–1936), a contemporary of Paluskar, was a lawyer and musicologist who wrote the first modern treatise of Hindustani music, based on contemporary oral traditions and medieval and ancient texts. In Bakhle's succinct words, Bhatkhande's 'achievement was to create for India a *bona fide* national classical music, with historical pedigree, theoretical complexity and a system of notation in which questions of devotion were left far behind'. Bakhle, 'Music as the Sound of the Secular', p. 269.

[97] Kapuria, 'Redefining Music's Sacrality'.

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Perhaps his greatest contribution, in the end, was the music competition which began 1977 onwards creatively to utilise the name and symbol of Harballabh to give a space to young and upcoming musicians to showcase their talent.[98]

One crucial question is why a permanent, long-term music academy failed to materialise on the Harballabh grounds. I have proposed that this was primarily due to the retention of the practice of 'free entry' to the festival, as a compromise between the Harballabh's convivial origins as a fair or *mela*, and its post-1947 professionalised concert *avatar*. Further, the academy never became a primary, lifelong commitment for its organisers, unlike the temple which embodied a collective identity, crucial for a self-definition of the patrons as 'good Hindus'. Without a set of adequate and concrete measures to turn their dreams into reality, the focus of the Mahasabha continues to be limited, until today, to organising the festival alone, instead of running a thriving musical academy or library.[99] This connects with the larger Hinduisation of public life in post-Independence India, whereby a religious engagement has replaced more secular commitments.

Yet, regardless of their failure to build a permanent music academy functioning round-the-year, the elites and industrialists of Jalandhar—largely upper caste and middle-class Hindus—have through their donations formed the financial pillar for the remarkable heights the festival scaled in these years. In spite of the state's many declarations to donate to the festival, the real support in running it has come from these groups, who have also had a strong investment in identifying themselves with a larger Hindu religiosity. From the 1970s onwards, the conception of a broader Hindu spatial geography was palpable in the enthusiastic fashion in which the new, massive temple was built by them on the Devi Talab grounds.

The space of performance at the festival thus altered significantly with the shifting nature of middle-class patronage: from its origins in a mystical gathering held in the memory of a *mahant* and attended by saints and local Punjab musicians in the late nineteenth century; to an increasing nationalisation with the priority it assigned to musicians external to the Punjab from the early twentieth century; onwards to the institution of measures for monetary remuneration for South Asia's best musicians, marking the professionalism and state-endorsed secularism during the early post-Independence years; and finally to the consolidation of a steadily Hinduised space at the Harballabh by the late twentieth century. The broader trajectory of the festival was from the fluid, cosmopolitan and all-inclusive devotionalism of its origins in the mid-nineteenth century, to the Paluskar-inspired Hindu nationalist agenda for music in the early twentieth century that excluded both local and

[98] In later years, the performance of the Saraswati Vandana and other devotional pieces at the start of every Sammelan became common. Kapuria, 'Redefining Music's Sacrality'.

[99] Indeed, the Harballabh Bhawan, the site of the music academy, remains in a state of partial completion alone. Despite a large grant towards building a music academy made by the Punjab Government in 2007, progress is slow. Ten years on, the official website still includes only a 'projected' image of the ideal 'Harballabh Bhawan'. Refer http://harballabh.org/harballabh-bhawan.htm

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Muslim musicians, followed by the secular nationalist agenda embodied by Kumar, with its emphasis on the popular through a romanticisation of 'peasant-connoisseur' listeners during the 1950s– 1960s, and ultimately the exclusivist religiosity evident in the turn to excessive Hinduisation from the late 1970s onwards.

More crucially, the article has explained why a regional music festival attained a unique national stature between 1948 and 1988, but also its later failure to be built on this position. This failure in Kumar's vision was due to its enmeshment with the Hinduisation of the public sphere in post-Independence India, apart from the positioning of the festival *vis-à-vis* both Sikh political mobilisation during the 1980s and the wider politics of Hindu assertion in late twentieth-century India.

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